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BALTIMORE**

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February 19, 2003

Ms. Morlene H. Dortch  
Secretary  
Office of the Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW, TW-B204  
Washington, DC 20554

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LEGAL COUNSEL

Mark Pollack, Esq.

RE: Application by Verizon Maryland, Verizon Washington, DC and Verizon West Virginia for Authorization To Provide In-Region, InterLata Services in State of Maryland, Washington, DC, and West Virginia. WC Docket No. 02-384.

Dear Ms. Dortch:

Downtown Partnership of Baltimore, Inc. is a business advocacy organization representing over **450** businesses in Baltimore City and the immediate surrounding area. We strongly encourage the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) to grant approval of Verizon's application to provide long-distance service to consumers in Maryland. Verizon's application is in the public interest and is of real benefit to telecommunications consumers in the State of Maryland. We are pleased that the Maryland State Public Service Commission and the U. S. Department of Justice are both supporting Verizon's application.

The FCC's approval of Verizon's application for long-distance service will increase the free market competition that results in increased efficiencies in service delivery, increased consumer choice, and decreased consumer costs. In states where Verizon has been approved to provide long distance services, the company has introduced simpler and less expensive plans than most other carriers and launched innovative packages. We welcome those competitive changes in Maryland.

Beyond the competitive, free market advantages we would experience, it is important to note that Verizon continues to epitomize "corporate citizenship" through its strong ethic of community service and involvement in many Baltimore City programs and initiatives. From direct philanthropy to serving on boards of many organizations and participating in school mentoring programs, the employees of Verizon add significantly to the "human capital" that strengthens our Downtown Baltimore community and the City at large.

As a strong business organization, we whole-heartedly endorse competition and the increased value and decreased cost that competition promotes. We urge your favorable consideration and support of Verizon's application.

Sincerely,

Michele L. Whelley  
President